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#### IV.—THE 'THOUGHT' MOTIF OF WISDOM VERSUS FOLLY IN GREEK TRAGEDY.

In a recent paper<sup>1</sup> Professor Knapp calls attention, with detailed analysis, to a recurrent *φρήν* or *φρονεῖν* motif in the *Antigone* of Sophocles. The author affirms that a consideration of this motif in the play will show that Sophocles meant to represent *Antigone* as wholly sinless and *Creon* as completely in the wrong; furthermore, that a subtitle to the play might well be *Φρόνημα* vs. *Ἀφροσύνη*, Right Thinking versus Wrong Thinking, Wisdom versus Folly, or, True Wisdom is it to obey God rather than Man. At the conclusion of the paper there is this foot-note: 'Some reader may ask whether such a recurrent motif can be found in any other Greek play. To my mind it matters little or nothing whether one can or can not be found'.

Professor Knapp's paper is interesting and excellently presented. Certainly, as he points out, the *Antigone* fairly bristles with variations of this 'Think', 'Think' motif. It is, I think, unquestionably true that by emphasizing this note the poet assists us to a complete realization of the foolish Wrong Thinking of the stubborn and narrow-minded *Creon* and the sublime True Wisdom of the pious and martyred *Antigone*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A. J. P. 37, 300-315. <Cf. A. J. P. 38, 337.—B. L. G.>

<sup>2</sup> The writer sees peculiar import where little or none exists, in my opinion, in the following lines: 169, 298, 762, 767, 768.

I do not agree with Professor Knapp in his assertion of the significance of lines 388 ff. He adds: "Not even so keen a critic as Jebb noticed that in these words of the Guard ('O King, naught is there against which man should take his oath, for after-thought belies his first intent') Sophocles forestalled (summed up) the outcome of the play". I do not believe that the poet consciously or purposely has the Guard prognosticate the *dénouement* of the play with *Creon's* downfall. The Guard merely refers to his own experience: 'I vowed I should not be here again,—yet here I am'. But he prefaces his statement with a gnomic utterance (characteristic of his kind in Greek tragedy) showing that, after all, his own experience perhaps is but that of all mankind. *βροτοῖσιν οὐδέν ἐστ' ἀπώμοτον*, which *sententia* had previously been affirmed by *Archilochus*, fr. 76.

The peculiar significance of the occurrence of this motif, however, may be over-emphasized. In any portrayal of a clash of wills or purposes is it not natural, even inevitable, that this issue of Wisdom versus Folly (together with their concomitant attributes) be dwelt upon<sup>1</sup>? And in Greek tragedy is this not a fundamental religious tenet, that 'True Wisdom is it to obey God rather than Man'? If so, we should expect to find this motif of the Antigone of frequent occurrence in other Greek tragedies. And, as a matter of fact, it is often found. For the purpose of illustration I shall take the Electra and the Oedipus Tyrannus of Sophocles and the Prometheus Bound of Aeschylus.

Let us consider first the Electra, and in particular the scenes between the sisters Electra and Chrysothemis in which the motif is of especial frequency. This is likewise the case in the Antigone in the dialogue between the sisters, Antigone and Ismene, where this note is much in evidence. The situations in the two plays are, to be sure, very similar. In both cases the stronger and more determined sister strives to win over the weaker to participation in a hazardous, although righteous, deed of daring. To the weaker sister, Ismene, Antigone's proposal to bury the corpse of Polyneices contrary to the edict of the king is, indeed, Folly, while to Chrysothemis, Electra's stern resolve herself to slay Aegisthus seems Unwisdom which wellnigh approaches insanity.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See end of paper for elaboration of this point.

<sup>2</sup> And yet there is no doubt that the poet intended us to see and believe that Electra was in the right so far as the moral issue is concerned. Chrysothemis herself admits the piety of the proposed deed, and the justification for it, but excuses herself from active participation in it because of her timid nature. Cf. 332 ff., especially 338: 'Nevertheless *right* is on the side of thy choice, not of that which I advise'. With this, Ismene's similar excuse when she refuses aid to her sister is to be compared: 'I, asking the Spirits Infernal to pardon, seeing that force is put on me herein (*ὡς βιάζομαι τάδε*), will hearken to our rulers'.

Likewise in the Antigone the poet unquestionably means us to feel the moral righteousness of the heroine's cause. This is not to say, however, that it is possible, or even tolerable, according to the Greek conception, for any hero of Greek tragedy to be *wholly* in the right or *wholly* in the wrong in respect to *all* their impulses and acts. This last question inevitably suggests the well-known passage in the Poetics

A brief statement (for lengthy discussion is not needed) of the pertinent lines in the *Electra* in which the motif is bandied back and forth follows. Chrysothemis dilates (328-340) on the necessity for prudence, which she herself observes, but which is disregarded by her foolish sister. *Electra* scornfully

(1453a) and the meaning of *ἀμαρτία* in Aristotle's definition of the tragic hero where he says: "A thoroughly good and just man (*ἐπιεικής*) must not be seen passing from happiness to misery; this is not fear-inspiring or piteous, but simply odious (*μισρόν*) to us. . . . Nor, on the other hand, should an extremely bad man be seen falling from happiness into misery; such a story may arouse the human feeling in us, but it will not arouse us to either pity or fear. There remains the intermediate kind of personage, a person *not preeminently virtuous and just*, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but δι' ἀμαρτίαν τινά".

The study of the character and conduct of heroes in Greek tragedy and Aristotle's own characterization of the tragic hero, δ μήτε ἀρετῇ διαφέρων καὶ δικαιοσύνη, influence me to concur with Butcher in his interpretation of *ἀμαρτία* (pp. 317 ff.: "*ἀμαρτία* is an elastic term not to be delimited precisely. It refers to a single great error, whether morally culpable or not") and to disagree with Bywater (note in ed. of *Poetics*, p. 215) and his supporter, van Braam (*Clas. Quart.* 1912). Bywater says: "It is strange that the *ἀμαρτία* of which Aristotle is speaking, should have been taken by Tumlirz and others to mean not an error of judgement, but some ethical fault or infirmity of character. The Sophoclean Oedipus is a man of hasty temper but his *ἀμαρτία* was not in that, but in the 'great mistake' he made, when he became unwittingly the slayer of his own father". But Oedipus slew his father in sudden and bitter anger as he himself tells the story (*O. T.* 807).<sup>1</sup> This impetuous impulsiveness of the hero, which at times approaches folly, is in evidence throughout the play (as is shown later in this paper) and it is this same blind impulsiveness which leads him to put out his own eyes.

Now in what respect is *Antigone* not altogether *ἐπιεικής*, and what is the 'error', or 'shortcoming', or 'tragic flaw' of the heroine, in the Aristotelian sense, which prevents the spectator from regarding her unhappy fate as *intolerably* *μισρόν* (revolting or offensive)? The flaw is imprudence in the extreme and rashness which, although admirably heroic, leads her not only to the bold accomplishment of the legally forbidden, though pious act, but even influences her to commit suicide. As the Chorus says (875): "Thy self-willed temper hath wrought thy ruin". Even Jebb says (*Intro.* p. xxii): "Sophocles has been content to make *Antigone* merely a nobly heroic woman, not a being exempt from human passion and human weakness". Furthermore, from the Greek view-point, in his discussion of the *ethos* of the Agents, Aristotle affirms (1454a): "The Agent must be true to type. There is, for

<sup>1</sup> Hardly an unbiased interpretation of the passage.—C. W. E. M.

brands such prudence as cowardice (341 ff.),<sup>1</sup> 'Then take thy choice, to be imprudent (*φρονεῖν κακῶς*); or prudent (*φρονοῦσα*), but forgetful of thy friends. I covet not such privilege as thine,—nor wouldst thou, wert thou wise (*σώφρων γ' οὔσα*)'. Chr. prophesies dread punishment for Electra: 'Do not blame me hereafter, when the blow hath fallen, now is the time *ἐν καλῷ φρονεῖν*'. El. prays that the blow may fall quickly. Chr. protests (390): 'Where are thy wits (*ποῦ ποτ' εἰ φρενῶν*;)?'<sup>2</sup> El. complains of her unhappy life. Chr. replies (394) that it might be happy if El. could only learn to be prudent (*εὖ φρονεῖν*) and adds (398): 'Tis well not to fall by folly (*ἐξ ἀβουλίας*)'. Chr. (402): 'Wilt thou not take my counsel?' El. (403) 'No, verily, long may it be before I am so foolish (*νοῦ κενή*)'.<sup>3</sup> Again Chr. implores (429): 'Hearken to me, and be not ruined by folly (*ἀβουλία πειεῖν*)!'<sup>4</sup> El. urges Chr.

example, a type of manly valor; but it is not appropriate in a female Agent to be manly (*ἀνδρείαν*)". It is to be noted that throughout the play, Antigone is rebuked for this culpable rashness (for her 'hot heart for chilling deeds') which makes her indifferent to all consequences, and for being swayed by manly, valorous impulses. Note especially in Ismene's speech in the very beginning of the play (61-64): "Nay, we must remember, first, that we were born women, as who should not strive with men; next, that we are ruled of the stronger, so that we must obey in these things, and in things yet sorer". Further, in a series of passages Creon emphasizes the odium of Antigone's assumption of masculinity and that it is unthinkable that he, a man and a king, should be disobeyed and worsted by a woman; cf. 484-5; 525; 579; 678-80.

I do not wish to be misunderstood as saying that Antigone, because of her impetuous rashness, and Oedipus, impulsive and prone to gusts of wrath, actually deserved the awful doom that fell upon them. As Butcher says (p. 309): "Nothing but a misplaced ingenuity, or a resolve at all costs to import a moral lesson into the drama can discover in Antigone any fault or failing which entailed on her suffering as its due penalty". But the fact remains that from the Aristotelian viewpoint Antigone, Oedipus, Prometheus, and Agamemnon are not entirely *ἐπιεικεῖς*. They have frailties which are human like our own; hence they are 'sympathetic characters' and *ἔλεος καὶ φόβος* are aroused in the audience which witnesses their misfortunes. On the tragic *ἀμαρτία*, see Cooper, ed. of the Poetics, p. 41, for an excellent note.

<sup>1</sup> Trans. of Soph. are, in part, by Jebb.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ism. to Ant. (42): *ποῦ γνώμης ποτ' εἰ*;

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Ism. to Ant. (68).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Ant. to Ism. (95): 'But leave me and my folly (*δυσβουλίαν*)'.

at least not to place Clytaemnestra's offerings on Agamemnon's tomb and the Chorus concludes this scene with the injunction to Chr. to obey El. in this, 'εἰ σωφρονήσεις'.<sup>1</sup>

Later in the play, after the news of Orestes' fictitious death has been reported, Electra again importunes Chrysothemis for help in the slaying of Aegisthus. In this scene (following the request in 990-1057) the motif recurs again and again. The key-note is struck by the Chorus (990) urging forethought (προμηθία). Chr. assents (993): 'Yea, and before she spoke, were she blest with a sound mind (φρενῶν μὴ κακῶν) she would have remembered caution'. 'Do thou learn prudence (νοῦν σχές)'. Again the Chorus side with Chr. warning El. thus (1015-16): 'Hearken, there is no better gain for mortals to win than foresight (προνοίας) and νοῦ σοφοῦ'. El. to Chr. (1027): 'I admire thy prudence (τοῦ νοῦ); thy cowardice I hate'. Chr. (1036): 'I am thinking for thy good (προμηθίας δὲ σοῦ)'. El. 'Must I follow thy rule of right'? Chr. (1038): 'When thou art wise (εὖ φρονῆς), then thou shalt be our guide'. El. (1047): 'Nothing is more hateful than bad counsel'. Chr.: 'Thou seemest to agree (φρονεῖν) with nothing that I urge'. And finally in the concluding lines of this scene: El. (1052): 'Nay, go within, never will I follow thee. It were great folly (πολλῆς ἀνοίας) even to attempt an idle quest'.<sup>2</sup> Chr. (1055): 'Nay, if thou art wise (φρονεῖν) in thine own eyes, be such wisdom thine (φρόνει τοιαῦθ)'.

Let us now turn to the Oedipus Tyrannus. In this powerful and profoundly impressive drama the hero, Oedipus, attains to the full revelation of his unhappy situation and meets with the fulfilment of his doom not merely as a helpless victim of Fate but through the agency of his own impetuous Folly, stubborn Self-will and Wrong Thinking. This infirmity of an essentially noble mind is repeatedly harped upon, first by the soothsayer Teiresias, and later by Creon.

Early in the play Teiresias, summoned by Oedipus, and bidden to reveal the slayer of Laius, exclaims (316) with deep feeling: 'Alas, how dreadful to have Wisdom (φρονεῖν) where it profits not the Wise (φρονούντι)'! Contrasted with the absolute wisdom of Teiresias, who is the mouth-piece of God, is

<sup>1</sup> For the τὸ φρονεῖν motif in Clyt. speech to El., see lines 529 and 550.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ant. 68: τὸ γὰρ περισσὰ πράσσειν οὐκ ἔχει νοῦν οὐδένα.

the folly of ignorance of Oedipus which is shortly to be completely revealed.<sup>1</sup> When Teiresias refuses to divulge the identity of the culprit, Oedipus implores (326): 'For the love of the gods, turn not away, if thou hast knowledge (*φρονῶν γε*): all we suppliants implore thee on our knees'. Whereupon Teiresias retorts (328): 'Aye, *πάντες γὰρ οὐ φρονεῖτ'*. In this phrase, *οὐ φρονεῖτ'*, there is double meaning, I think. Not merely does Teiresias refer to the ignorance of Oedipus and the other suppliants as to the real situation, but especially does he rebuke the unwisdom of Oedipus in seeking to probe the matter.

Creon, having learned of the serious charges brought against him, seeks Oedipus, with upbraidings. Oedipus, exasperated, exclaims (548): 'Explain me not one thing—that thou art not false'. To this Creon replies (549): 'If thou deemest that stubborn self-will without sense (*τὴν αὐθαδίαν* <sup>2</sup> . . . τοῦ νοῦ *χωρίς*) is a good gift, thou art not wise (*οὐκ ὀρθῶς φρονεῖς*)'.<sup>3</sup>

A further contrast between Creon's conservative and judicial temperament<sup>4</sup> and Oedipus' impulsiveness is revealed by Creon's significant line (569): 'Where I lack light (*ἐφ' οἷς γὰρ μὴ φρονῶ*), 'tis my wont to be silent'. We may compare also line 589 where Creon affirms that, in the circumstances, he has no yearning to be king, nor 'hath any man who knows how to keep a sober mind (*σωφρονεῖν*)'; likewise line 600 of Creon's defence: 'No mind will become false, if it is wise (*καλῶς φρονῶν*)'. Oedipus' infirmity is further emphasized by the gnomic warning of the Chorus (616): 'The quick in counsel (*φρονεῖν οἱ ταχεῖς*) are not sure'. Compare also 626, where Creon finally accuses Oedipus of lack of sanity (*οὐ γὰρ φρονοῦντά σ' εὖ βλέπω*); and 649, when the Chorus begs Oedi-

<sup>1</sup> Just as the folly and doom of Oedipus are early presaged in the tragedy by the hero's clash with the unerring soothsayer and by the latter's pronouncement so in the Ant. that Creon is to be regarded as clearly in the wrong is evidenced in the clash with Teiresias.

<sup>2</sup> For *αὐθαδία* the key-word of Aesch. *Prom.* see below.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Oedipus' *tu quoque* (552), *οὐκ εὖ φρονεῖς*.

<sup>4</sup> Admirable is Jebb's characterization of Creon (Intro. to O. T. xxix), especially felicitous in the light of the present: "It might be said that the Creon of the O. T. embodies a good type of Scottish character, as the Creon of the Ant.—an earlier sketch—is rather of the Prussian type".

pus to come to a sound mind (πιθοῦ θελήσας φρονήσας τ' ἀναξ, λίσσομαι), and Creon, grudgingly forgiven, departs with the weighty words: 'I will go my way; thee have I found undiscerning (πορεύσομαι, σοῦ μὲν τυχὼν ἀγνώτος).

In the Prometheus Bound of Aeschylus the motif of Folly versus Wisdom, or, in particular, True Wisdom is it to obey God rather than Man, is dominant throughout.<sup>1</sup> This note is struck in the opening lines when the implacable Kratos exultingly pronounces the doom of Prometheus in that the latter must pay the penalty for his disobedience to God for the theft of fire for man. Further, in 85-86:

ψευδωνύμως σε δαίμονες προμηθέα  
καλοῦσιν' αὐτὸν γάρ σε δει προμηθέωσ.

The wisdom which underlies obedience and, on the contrary, the wages of a sinful tongue (321) are insisted upon by Oceanus (337), who thus admonishes Prometheus: 'Far better by nature art thou to give sensible advice (φρενοῦν) to thy neighbor than to thyself' and exhorts him to repent and give heed (380): 'For words are the physicians of a mood distempered (ὀργῆς νοσοῦσης)'. The obdurate Prometheus, however, characterizes (383) Oceanus' proposed intervention as light-witted folly (κουφόνουν εὐηθίαν). Oceanus ironically retorts: 'Suffer me to be sick with this sickness (τῇ νόσῳ νοσεῖν)<sup>2</sup> since 'tis best to be wise while seeming the contrary (εἰ φρονοῦντα μὴ φρονεῖν δοκεῖν).

The key-word of the play of the Prometheus is αὐθαδία, i. e., stubborn, self-willed folly.<sup>3</sup> The term characterizes that be-setting sin of Prometheus which spurred him on to wilful dis-

<sup>1</sup> This was not recognized, of course, when it was not known or realized that the P. V. is but one play in a Prometheus trilogy. Then Prom. was naturally regarded as a wise and innocent victim, and Zeus as an ungrateful and heartless tyrant, a conception wholly false to Aesch. religious orthodoxy.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ant. 1050-52:

Tei. ὅσω κράτιστον κτημάτων εὐβουλία;  
Cr. ὅσῳ περ, οἶμαι, μὴ φρονεῖν πλείστη βλάβη.  
Tei. ταύτης σὺ μέντοι τῆς νόσου πλήρης ἔφυσ.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Prom. 64, 79, 436, 907, 964, 1012, 1034. αὐθαδία is likewise a characteristic of Medea; cf. Eur. Med. 28-9, 38, 223, 621. Cf. also Ant. 1028.

obedience and bold defiance of Zeus, and which finally brought upon him, as arch-rebel, humiliating and awful punishment. That he is influenced by such a fault is denied by Prometheus (436) and, in fact, in that magnificent speech of defiance against Zeus (907-927) he accuses the *τύραννος θεῶν* of being *αὐθάδη φρονῶν* (907).

It is in the dialogue with Hermes that Prometheus is repeatedly censured for his *αὐθαδία* which is opposed to *εὐβουλία*. Thus, in lines 964-5, Hermes admonishes him: 'Truly it was by just such wilful folly (*αὐθαδίσμασιν*) before that thou didst moor thyself to this misfortune'. Again (1000), addressing Prometheus, Hermes exclaims: 'Take heart, O foolish one (*μάταιε*), take heart at last in view of these calamities to think aright (*ὀρθῶς φρονεῖν*)'. For (1012-13) *αὐθαδία* in one that thinks not aright (*φρονοῦντι μὴ καλῶς*) itself by itself has greater strength than naught'. Likewise (1034-5): 'Never think, Prometheus, *αὐθαδία* is better than *εὐβουλία*'. In these 'minatory and monitory' injunctions of Hermes the Chorus concurs (1036-9): 'In our opinion Hermes gives timely counsel; for he bids thee abandon thy *αὐθαδία* and seek wise *εὐβουλία*. O yield! It is disgraceful for the wise to err'. Already had the Chorus in a beautiful and pious prayer (542-4) pointed out Prometheus' infirmity (i. e., *αὐθαδία*) although in different language: 'For in thy self-will (Folly) *ἰδίᾳ γνώμῃ*, thou honorest mortals o'er much, Prometheus'.

Does not the examination to which we have subjected these three plays reveal the frequency and purpose of this motif as employed by the Greek dramatists? Its exact significance (where it occurs) is determined by the exigency of plot, character, or situation. Thus, *τὸ φρονεῖν* and its variants, in the *Electra* generally have reference to prudence and caution; in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, to wisdom; in the *Prometheus*, to obedience to God. It is true that in the *Antigone* the motif occurs most frequently, now in one sense, now in another. But this is what one might expect in a play where there is contention and clashing of wills and purposes throughout: first, between *Antigone* and *Ismene*; secondly, between *Antigone* and *Creon*; thirdly, between *Creon* and *Haemon*; and fourthly, between *Creon* and *Teiresias*.

Finally, in our consideration of this aspect of our subject,

Aristotle (Poetics, 1450a and b) is of service in his analysis of tragedy and its formative or constitutive elements. "The first essential", he says, "is Plot; second, the Characters; third, the element of *Thought* (ἡ διάνοια), i. e., the power of the Agent to say whatever can be said (τὰ ἐνόντα) or whatever is appropriate to the occasion (τὰ ἀρμόττοντα). Thought is shown in all the Agents say when proving or disproving some particular point, or enunciating some universal proposition. It is that element in the speeches of a drama which is supplied by the study of Politics and the art of Rhetoric". As Bywater says (edit. p. 172) the Agents in a Greek tragedy are personages of importance, great position and lineage; they naturally speak πολιτικῶς (like statesmen), i. e., they show a statesman-like power of saying what is appropriate to the situation before them. They speak also ῥητορικῶς (like rhetors) with something of the rhetor's cleverness in seizing on the various possible points that may be urged on the occasion.

In critical scenes in Greek tragedy in which Agents engage in keen debate or controversy we should expect to find, therefore, as we do find, Aristotle's element of Thought, elaborated and emphasized by what we may designate as the 'Thought' motif; Wisdom versus Folly. Each Agent presents his arguments and defends his position πολιτικῶς καὶ ῥητορικῶς to the best of his ability, so as to show his own Right Thinking and Wisdom and the Wrong Thinking and Folly of his opponent.

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